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Examining the Effect of Service Personal Values on Emotional Satisfaction with Service Experience among International Students in Malaysian Public Universities

Wan Salmuni Wan Mustaffa^{a*}, Khuan Wai Bing^b, Rafiduraida Abdul Rahman^a & Hariyaty Ab Wahid^a

^a*Department of Business Management & Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia.*

^b*Department of Management & Leadership, Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia*

Abstract

Malaysia has been recognized as a higher education destination for international students. Recently, the issue of ensuring a positive service experience among international students in Malaysian public universities has gained enormous attention. However, dealing with international students adds additional expectations and responsibilities for the universities. International students might experience different educational services in the host country compared to their home country. Previous research has revealed that services provided in Malaysian public universities still fail to address students' personal values and emotional needs. In light of this gap, this research aims to explore and examine the relationship between service personal values (SPV) and emotional satisfaction (E-SAC) based on service experience among international students in Malaysian public universities. International students attending Malaysian public universities were selected as the research sample. The data were gathered through an online survey. The online questionnaire was sent to international students via email following the proportionate stratified sampling technique. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS was performed to test the relationship between SPV and E-SAC. The results revealed that SPV has a positive effect on E-SAC. In this research, the relationship appeared to be significant as conceptualized according to the theory. This research also discusses the theoretical and managerial implications as well as the directions for future research.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6-015-48117825; fax: +6-019-9848324.
E-mail address: wan.salmuni@fpe.ups.edu.my

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of the Malaysian international higher education market in recent years has spurred the growth of international students' enrollment. The data derived from the Malaysian higher education sector indicates that more than 80,000 international students are pursuing their education in Malaysia (MoHE, 2011). The Ministry of Higher Education also aims to accelerate the inflow of international students to 150,000 by 2015 and 200,000 by 2020, which would generate MYR 600 billion (MoHE, 2011). An international student is defined as an individual pursuing education outside his or her home country (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2009). However, dealing with international students adds additional responsibilities and expectations for the universities. International students can assess different educational services in the host country than in their home country (Lim, Yap, & Tee, 2011; Richards & Abdul Aziz, 2011; Yee, Hazlin, & Moktar, 2013). Existing research has reported that international students' experience with regard to Malaysian public universities' services is only at a moderate level (Jalali, Islam, & Ku Ariffin, 2011; Rajab, Abdul Rahman, & Shaari, 2011; Rasli, Shekarchizadeh, & Iqbal, 2012; Shekarchizadeh, Rasli, & Hon-Tat, 2011; Siang, 2012). Thus, some areas in service delivery still do not fully satisfy international students. The research has suggested that the service rendered should embrace the ability to address students' personal values and affective aspects. Therefore, research is needed to explore the concept of personal values and affective aspects with service experience among international students in Malaysian public universities.

Service information is retained and evaluated in customers' cognition at three levels of abstraction, namely service personal values (highest level), service value, and service quality (lowest level) (Lages & Fernandes, 2005; Zeithaml, 1988). Although the lower levels have been extensively investigated, a clear research gap remains at the highest level of abstraction (Lages & Fernandes, 2005; Liu, Ma & Zhao, 2007; Thuy & Hau, 2010). The limited investigation at the highest level is probably due to its individuality and complexity compared to other levels. Yet, researchers have rarely explored and examined the role of personal values in service setting (Durvasula, Lysonski, & Madhavi, 2011). Service personal values (SPV) are defined as the customers' cognitive evaluation of the use of a service based on the ultimate goals they wish to achieve in their lives (Durvasula, Lysonski, & Madhavi, 2011; Lages & Fernandes 2005). The affective or emotional aspect refers to positive or negative feelings (Wilkie, 1994). Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996) narrowed down the concept of customers' affective evaluation as an emotional satisfaction (E-SAC). E-SAC represents customers' evaluative responses to a pleasurable emotional state that results from their cognitive evaluation (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Yu & Dean, 2001). Westbrook and Reilly (1983) postulated that customers' personal values precede emotional satisfaction. However, research on the relationship between SPV and E-SAC is still in the early stages (Lages & Fernandes, 2005). SPV can be referred as the customers' ultimate beliefs that strongly influence their emotions (Laverie et al., 1993; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Thus, this research aims to examine the relationship between SPV and E-SAC.

2. Literature review

The need to understand the concepts of SPV and E-SAC as well as their interrelationships led to a search of the literature related to the Means-End Chain (MEC) Theory (Zeithaml, 1988; Lages & Fernandes, 2005) and the Value-Percept Disparity Theory (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). The following section discusses the theories underpinning the relationship between SPV and E-SAC.

2.1. Means-End Chain (MEC) Theory

Lages and Fernandes (2005) adapted the MEC model from Zeithaml (1988) to understand the customer's cognitive structure in a service context. As shown in Figure 1, service information is retained in the customer's memory at three levels of abstraction. The lowest level of abstraction is service quality, which is defined as the discrepancy between customers' perceptions of services offered and their expectations about firms offering such

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